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ABSTRACT

Beginning with the principle that self-concept and self-esteem are learned, this paper describes the adolescent self and its social concomitants. The depiction of adolescence emphasizes adolescents' ability to think abstractly and their knowledge of the mind's ability to process, direct, and manipulate experience. In contrast with the "radical empiricist" younger child, the adolescent is seen as a "psychological clinician." This "clinician" includes social personality characteristics in his or her conceptualization of self, learns to integrate diverse elements of the self, and knows the self in relation to others and to social conventions. It is acknowledged that, while adolescents are introspective and self-analytical, they may sometimes experience painful self-consciousness and engage in histrionics. The discussion very briefly considers factors influencing and influenced by the development of social competency and self-esteem. Changes in self-esteem are explored, with emphasis being given to the principles that (1) motivation for maintaining and improving self-esteem is ever-present, and (2) the self-concept develops in a social context. Implications of these principles for improving self-esteem and countering effects of unemployment are pointed out. Also discussed are the way adolescents think about problems of adolescents, such as early pregnancy and drug abuse, and the relationship of low self-esteem and school absenteeism. Concluding remarks explore the topic of subcultures and adolescent identity. Included in the discussion is a brief description of the punk rock subcultures of Great Britain, Australia, and Los Angeles. (RH)

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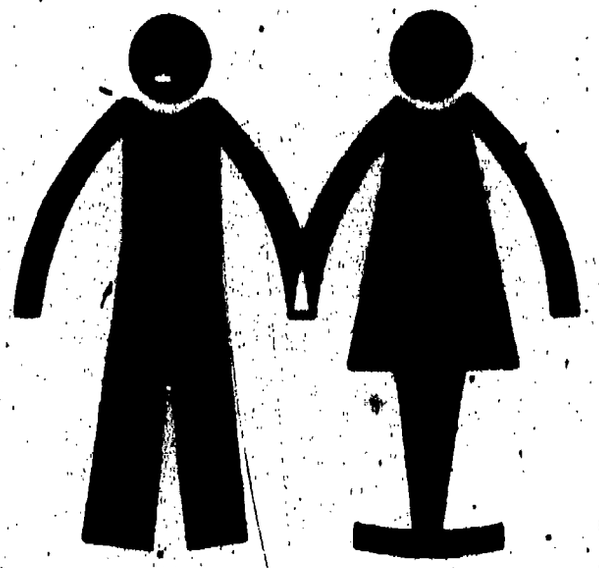

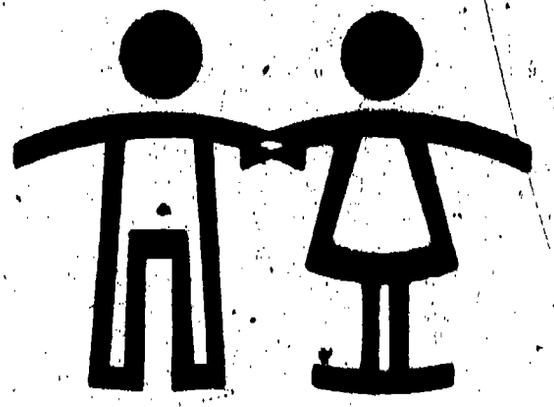

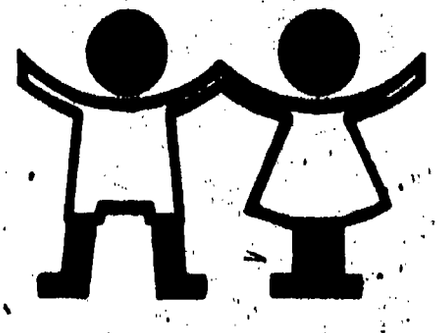

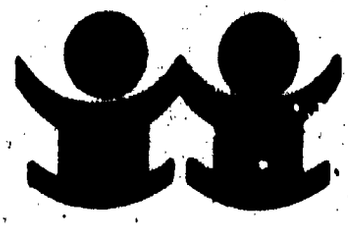

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ADOLESCENT THINKING: SELF-CONCEPT, RELATIONSHIPS AND PUNK

By Dr Shelley Phillips

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ADOLESCENT THINKING:

SELF-CONCEPT, RELATIONSHIPS AND PUNK

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Since the topic concerns adolescents, one obviously needs to define how one is using the term. Typically, adolescence is regarded as a developmental period between childhood and adulthood and is defined chronologically by the teenage years. Some define it in terms of biological changes, others as caused by our economy and culture since, in some societies, after the age of 6 or a little older, children are not distinguished greatly from adults. Such concepts are rather limited and do not tell us what it is like to be an adolescent.

A rather more useful model is one that takes physical and biological changes and the social context into account but makes the *adolescent's thought and activity* the pivot of the definition - in other words, how adolescent's perceive and think and why they react as they do. This emphasis upon the adolescent's perception and thought or *cognition* permits not only a broad and empathetic view of the adolescent, but also a practical one, which Unit for Child Studies evaluations suggest that parents and professionals prefer. One cannot explain adolescence totally in cognitive terms but the emphasis in this paper is to aid understanding of how the adolescent sees things and the developmental processes which are occurring in a number of areas. As one of the areas we shall discuss relates to the self-concept and self-esteem, these terms need clarifying also. Over the past four years the Unit for Child Studies has carried out an educational campaign to increase community and professional understanding of the nature of self-concept development and self-esteem. Now educationists and medical personell are beginning to take the concept seriously and are coming to understand the role they play in learning, behaviour, and health. As these issues have been discussed so frequently in previous Unit for Child Studies' seminars, I shall only briefly define them here. For background reading I recommend Unit for Child Studies Selected Papers No. 1 (Maron, 1980), and chapter 5 in the book *Young Australians* (Phillips, 1979). I also recommend Selected Paper No. 27, "Self Concept and Self Esteem: Infancy to Adolescence" (Phillips, 1983a), as the health aspects of the adolescent's self-concept which are discussed there will not be mentioned here, nor will other topics, such as adolescent popularity neuroses, conflicts with parents, concern with physical appearance and other matters, be repeated.

First and briefly, what is the self-concept? It is the collection of descriptive things that one might say about oneself to sum up oneself as a person. It includes one's sex, occupation, interests, skills, values, and personality.

As a person, one also has beliefs, attitudes and feelings towards oneself. Usually these involve *(1)* self acceptance (whether one feels basically competent and happy), *(2)* self security (one's perception of one's emotional confidence or stability), *(3)* social confidence (one's beliefs about one's ability to relate in social situations), and *(4)* self assertion (one's ability to express and gain one's needs) (Ellis, Gehman & Katzenmeyer, 1980).

These dimensions take form in a personal social context. For example, the fact that one is an immigrant, Jewish, aboroginal, a fifth generation Australian, or male or female may be central to one's self-concept. At the same time, if one has learnt that society holds negative views toward aboriginies, Jews, women or whatever, one may then develop a feeling that it is not always good to be such a person. In this situation, one may put a poor value on that aspect of the self-concept and thus, it may be said that self-esteem is poor. Self-esteem involves self-acceptance and acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses.

However, one needs to add a note of caution. There is a tendency to use self-esteem and self-concept too globally. As a result there is a "widespread occurrence of null and weak findings" in studies relating self-esteem to achievement, ability and interpersonal relationships (Wylie, 1979, p 690). This is because sufficient account has not been taken of developmental differences in self-concept and self-esteem.

Most measures of self-esteem do not include a recognition that the conceptual bases of a child or an adult's self evaluation may be differently construed and differently weighted in different periods in the subject's development (Damon & Hart, 1982). Similarly, self-esteem building activities need to be chosen for their relevance to the age group concerned. For this reason a developmental approach to self-concept and self-esteem is important and one of the themes in this paper is the special significance of the self-concept to the adolescent. It is different from that of the adult, the primary school child, or the pre-schooler (Phillips, 1983a). Thus, one needs to indicate some of these developmental differences before one can understand the adolescent.

I will outline them briefly.

SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-ESTEEM IS LEARNT

The evidence is that self-concept and self-esteem are largely learnt in infancy and childhood, although they may be changed or modified in later life, depending on one's experience. It is believed that we are not born with a self-concept and as infants and children, we learn it largely as a result of the way *others react to us*.

It is, of course, difficult to discover the extent of infants' self-awarenes s. They cannot verbalise, but it is believed that their self awareness is very diffuse and the first step is learning about the parameters of their own bodies and self recognition. This is discussed in Unit for Child Studies Paper No. 23 (Phillips, 1982a). How caretakers hold and cuddle the baby appears to lay the foundations for a good feeling and sense of the bodily self. In infancy self recognition is most probably learnt through touch, hearing, smell and self movement as babies explore hands and feet, learn to walk and vocalise. Visual self recognition in a mirror seems not to come until the end of the second year of life (Amsterdam, 1972; Damon & Hart, 1982).

At 14 or 15 months a growing awareness of self volition is apparent and the child may resist putting on a jumper or going to bed. How the caretakers handle these beginnings of self assertion aids the early sense of independence and confidence (Phillips, 1982b).

In early childhood (3-5 years) the self appears to be conceived in *physical* terms. Children at this age distinguish themselves from others on the basis of their physical appearance (I have blue eyes), name, size (I am big), and possessions (Phillips, 1983). They describe themselves in terms of their

physical activities (I walk to kindy). They do not distinguish between mind and body and express feelings in acts and link self volition to body parts: "I am the boss of myself ... (because) my mouth told my arm and my arm does what my mouth tells it to do." (Selman, 1980, p 95). Thus, learning physical skills and plenty of free activity is important to the child's self-concept development at this stage.

Action continues to be an important element in primary school children's self-knowledge but there is a new quality. Unlike pre-schoolers, who describe themselves in terms of typical activities (I ride a bike), older children describe themselves in terms of their *activities* in *relation* to others ("I can ride a bike better than my brother") (Secord & Peevers, 1974). This suggests children are now distinguishing themselves from others by comparisons rather than in absolute terms. They are, however, very concrete and tangible comparisons likened to self-activities ("I help by digging the garden").

Towards the end of primary school most children also become capable of some self criticism regarding their behaviour and skills. While this still concerns fairly concrete and tangible things, it also involves a growing ability to make estimates of their own behaviour and thoughts.

This ability is aided by the fact that during middle childhood there begins a developmental shift in self-knowledge from activities to simple psychological concepts. For example, by 8 or so, the child realises that the mind can fool oneself and there are discrepancies between one's inner experience and one's outer appearance ("You may look happy but be sad"). At this age children begin to distinguish between mind and body although this distinction is not as clear as it will become in adolescent years. Children now begin to understand the mental and volitional aspects of self in their own terms, removed from their direct links to particular body parts. They are also beginning to understand the nature of thought and this brings about qualitative changes in how they are able to envisage themselves.

At around six years of age the child may conceive of thought as solid and material, perhaps coming from the mouth when speaking or from the ear that hears (Piaget, 1975). By seven or eight he/she believes it is still a material thing although he/she learns that thought lies in the head. It is not until eleven or twelve or older that the child learns that thought is not a solid material thing but something more insubstantial which can be wonderfully manipulated, reversed, and used to pursue possibilities and combinations without recourse to concrete activities. This opens the way for thinking about oneself in complex psychological terms which becomes a major aspect of adolescent self-concept development. But first, more precisely, what does this new understanding of thought involve?

ADOLESCENCE

The New Tool: Thinking abstractly

Having discovered the nature of thought and that they can think in the head, young adolescents tend to avidly, even wildly, employ this new set of processes in order to make sense of themselves, their experience and the world about them. In fact, some define adolescence in terms of the first possible realisation of these processes (Hayes, 1982).

With their advent the adolescent is able to practice the ability to think hypothetically, deductively and to combine relationships in a wide range of possibilities. They thus have a new analytic tool which allows them, not only to perceive the world as it is, but also as it could be or is capable of becoming (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). This accounts for much of the idealism of ado-

lescents and their non-pragmatic schemes and plans. They tend to believe that they only have to think of a plan and it is done. Thinking is what preoccupies adolescents most. They are philosophers and daydreamers.

The adolescent practices his/her newly-realised capacity for analyzing and hypothesising in his/her thinking about his/her family, society in general, or his/her self. Thus, at this stage, adolescents may constantly compare the possible and the actual and criticise their own family or society's usual way of doing things. Carried away with their new-found ability to hypothesise they may question whether the world they perceive actually exists and whether themselves are real or a product of their own hypotheses. One adolescent was stating: "I found myself thinking about my future, and then I thought about why I was thinking about my future, and then I began to think about why I was thinking about why I was thinking about my future" (Coleman, 1977, p. 183).

The New Concept of Mind

Not only is there a developmental change in the attitude toward thought as such, but also toward the mind. Because the adolescent now knows the possibility of self reflection he/she know that the mind can process, direct and manipulate one's experience. This gives a new mode of self-control (Selman, 1980). For example:

> *After a quarrel with his best friend John, Peter (aged 15) told himself they did not have much in common and he could get along better without him. "If I tell myself often enought that I stand on my own two feet better without him I can fool myself into thinking I am better off."*

Young adolescents (13-15 years) also recognise that the mind is an entity in its own right and *can operate independently of the self's physical activity* (Broughton, 1978) (Jane aged 13: "With our minds we can decide what to do"). There is also an appreciation that one's mind also has *continuity* and *stability* and through it one has access to knowing oneself in a way that is *private* (Bill 14: "I know what I feel about things, but I cannot know how others feel privately").

In early adolescence there is a tendency to believe that one largely has control over one's thoughts and emotions with but an embryonic understanding that this may not always be the case and there may be limits. This leads to some unrealism about personal power and the power of thought itself. Young adolescents tend to view the self primarily in mental terms and their new discoveries of the volition and manipulative powers of thought to manipulate and motivate augment that view. Later in adolescence there develops the notion that there is non-conscious mental experience as well as conscious.

> *Says Andrew, 16, of the aforementioned Peter: "He may not want to admit that he feels sad. He may not want to face these feelings so he doesn't recognise how badly he feels."*

Late in adolescence there also emerges a recognition of the *unique* qualities of one's mental processes and that each one may have different thinking procedures.

> *"Some are real, some are phony, and some quite silly. I think I have more phony thoughts than the other girls in my class" said Annette, aged 17.*

Thus, in late adolescence there is a *more realistic understanding* of thinking and how it applies to self understanding. Older adolescents recognise that there are regularities within oneself and the mental self, even though the mind is not always quite honest with itself.

THE ADOLESCENT AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CLINICIAN

A distinguishing feature of adolescent thought is an emphasis on possibility rather than reality (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Before adolescence the child has an earth-bound, concrete, practical-minded sort of problem-solving approach (Flavell, 1977). The child is a "radical empiricist" responding to external stimuli (Rosenberg, 1979) but the adolescent is a "psychological clinician" able to reflect on and contemplate external stimuli. Learning to synthesise and organise thoughts and feelings into appropriate concepts enables adolescents to view themselves qualitatively differently from when they were younger. There is, of course, not a sudden shift from the concrete action descriptions of self to the abstract ones. Bernstein (1980) found in mid-adolescence a linking of self actions by a common theme. For example, adolescents may say that they play a guitar and drink coke with friends because of the opportunity this provides for them to be seen as and feel sociable which is an aspect of their self-concept.

However, almost all researchers have found that adolescent self understanding exhibits an increasing tendency to describe self in terms of abstractions and general evaluations rather than in specific acts and qualities as in childhood (Secord & Peevers, 1974). There is an increasing use of psychological and social relational concepts in self descriptions. For example, Jane says she is "excessively selfconscious" and this prevents her from being "as popular" as she would like to be. This ability is also an outcome of the growing awareness of the processes of self-reflection and the ability to be conscious of one's own self-awareness. Jo says:

> *"I saw myself as I used to be playing with my dolls and remembered how I used to feel and it is different from how I feel now."*

The Social Personal Self

Whereas the primary school child may rarely describe him/herself in terms of interpersonal traits (I am friendly, shy, etc.) there is an increasing use of these throughout adolescence (Rosenberg, 1979). Thus, we find children in late primary school refering to situational, behavioural and emotional aspects of their selves (I go to the shop to buy an icecream; I get angry with my sister) while adolescents, and particularly older adolescents, refer to their social personality characteristics, and their beliefs concerning their acceptance of social rules:

> *"I am rather emotional and this makes some of my friends uncomfortable. But I think we don't express our emotions enough and the stiff upper lip thing is bad for one's personal development."* says Mary aged 17.

Integration of Diverse Elements

Whereas the self descriptions of a 10-year-old do not recognise possible contradictions, by mid-adolescence diversity of self-definition is recognised but there is no construction of a co-ordinating principle behind the diversity (Bernstein, 1980).

As one 14-year-old says:
"When I am at home I am very quiet but with my friends I am talkative and laugh a lot. I don't know why. I am like two different people."

By the end of adolescence there is recognition of the diversity of oneself and how it is organised into a coherent self system.

Phyllis, a 19-year-old says:
"I am not very talkative at home because nobody listens, but my friends listen and are interested and make me feel like a person so I talk a lot with them."

The principle here that co-ordinates between the two contradictory statements (talkativeness and silence) is the self-desire to engage in meaningful communication when talking. Thus, in older adolescents, there is a recognition of an underlying dimension of self which provides internal consistency for behaviours which appears discrepant (Bernstein, 1980). Another example is that of a nineteen-year-old Jan who says

"I take my little sister to the pictures about once a month but I never take my young brother out because he won't do as he is told. I like to try and be kind but if he tries to make me miserable then I am not kind so what's the point?"

The stages of self description outlined here: physicalistic (pre-school), active-social (middle childhood) and psychological (adolescence) are not mutually exclusive. For example, very young children may express self descriptions that are active rather than physical and they sometimes also make self statements that are social (e.g. group membership), and even psychological (e.g. emotional states: "I am sad"). Also, the physical and active-social self remain important to most individuals throughout life, long after they are capable of predominantly psychological self-concepts. However, there is an age-related shift that favours, respectively, physical, active-social and then psychological-aspects of self as the child becomes the adolescent. At each new level a new aspect of self assumes dominance and lends it characteristics to other aspects of self. Because of this Damon and Hart (1982) assert that self esteem inventories and assessment ought to take these developmental changes into account. When young children are involved, test items should focus on the body and its typical activities whereas with adolescents, items must focus on the social and psychological aspects of self, and on notions of the self's unique, volitional and self-reflective experience (Damon & Hart, 1982).

Locus of Self Knowledge and Growing Societal Awareness

When asked who knows best what they are like deep down inside, most primary school children will say that their parents know them best rather than themselves (Rosenberg, 1979). By 12 to 14 years at least two-thirds of adolescents appear to believe that they know their inner selves better than their parents do. Once one's mental processes are seen as unique (Rosenberg, 1979) then it follows that there is an awareness that no one can ever understand one's experience as fully as one can oneself (Damon & Hart, 1982).

The adolescent's increasing ability for abstract thought gradually allows adolescents to focus their attention upon themselves from the outside in. They begin to define themselves in relation not only to friends, but to society in general, ("I am a drop out", "I am going to get on"), whereas as a child they saw society merely as an extension of themselves ("I'll be a doctor")(Hayes, 82).

Adolescents begin to be able to take another's perspective and see persons as having multiple dimensions. Persons can know each other at different qualitative levels, for example, as friends, or, best friends or lovers (Hayes, 1982). This requires knowing oneself in relation to others and to the social conventions. Thus the discovery of self in adolescence involves an examination of self in relation to the society of which the adolescent has recently become aware.

In this respect our educational system is markedly deficient. Adolescents are obliged to rely heavily on peers when examining the conflicts in which they find themselves. They are left to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Hayes (1982) suggests that education should involve adolescents in the examination of those events which affect the course of their development and in the active practice of their own judgement. If the environment provides little or no such tasks for the adolescent, then the development of perspective taking, abstract thought and a rounded self-concept is thwarted. If the schools will not take up this task, then it is up to parents to inform themselves and do it, preferably together. The Unit for Child Studies seminars are designed to assist in this area.

SELF CONSCIOUSNESS IN ADOLESCENCE

In the initial stages of the developing ability for perspective taking and abstract thought, adolescents are apt to become painfully self conscious. They are now able, as indicated earlier, to hypothesise and to think objectively about their own thoughts. They become introspective and self analytical and sometimes painfully self aware (Conger, 1977). Because of the painfulness of this process, it tends to be forgotten almost as soon as adulthood is attained and this is why there is often such misunderstanding between adults and adolescents.

The new-found capacity for abstract thought not only enables the adolescent to conceptualise his or her own thought, it also permits him/her to conceptualise the thought of other people. However, there are limits to adolescent judgement and logic, and they tend to believe the psychological world revolves around them. This cognitive characteristic has been described by David Elkind (1978) as adolescent ego centricism.

Although pubescent boys or girls know that other people are not usually thinking the same things as they themselves are thinking, they sometimes have trouble realising that others are not thinking something about them. For instance, adolescents are involved in a period of rapid physiological and biological change and are often very preoccupied with their physical appearance, sometimes spending hours in front of a mirror and tend to assume the whole world is judging the results. A single pimple may be enough to make them want to go into hiding. Entering a crowded room may involve an air of either being the most admired human being alive or one who imagines contempt in every glance (Stassen Berger, 1980). In his or her own mind, whenever each adolescent is in public, he or she is on stage playing before a critical or imaginary audience. Some of the boorish behaviour of young adolescents in public places has to be understood in these terms (Elkind, 1978).

One of the most popular American authors for this age group, M.E. Kerr, captures the psychology of this in a novel for adolescents entitled: *Dinky Hooker Shoots Smack*. (Matter, 1982; Kerr, 1972). Dinky is a female aged fourteen who is trying to find an audience. She is apt to make scenes in behaviour and dress. For example, early in the book she is described as wearing her father's tweed vest over a T-shirt, green cotton pyjama bottoms and old white tennis socks. It is not that she simply doesn't care about her appearance, she is calling for attention. She also calls for her mother's attention by vandalism

which can be one of the more pathological and disturbing forms of imaginary audience bahviour (Elkind, 1978).

Tucker Woolf, Dinky's friend, is also an adolescent who manifests imaginary audience behaviour, but he is far more typically super self-conscious and less destructive than Dinky. Tucker invites Dinky's cousin Natalia to a dance but never fully concentrates on what Natalia is saying because, when he is with her, he is plagued with disturbing thoughts: Does he smell of perspiration? If he takes off his shoes will his feet smell? Is his breath all right? Sometimes he would even go into the Hocker's bathroom, "raise his arms and smell his armpits, then come back and sit in Natalia's presence with his arms glued to his sides" (Matter, 1982). Tucker's discomforture is a product of his assumption that those near him are as preoccupied with his social failings as he.

Marie Matter (1982) who reviewed seven of Kerr's adolescent novels believed them useful to increase adult insights into adolescent behaviour and provide helpful models for adolescents because they reveal characteristics of the egocentric behaviours of adolescents, first attaining the capacity for abstract thought. She believes the books can be used as a means for mutual sharing of insights between adults and adolescents and particularly between teachers and adolescents. The problem is that these are American-based and we need something similar for the Australian scene.

Histrionics

Another aspect of adolescent egocentricism which is a product of new thought processes out of control, is the tendency to over-differentiate feelings and to believe that no one experiences raptures or agonies as he/she does. "You don't understand how it feels". They may also see their own lives as heroic or even mythical, and destined for fame and fortune by making rare discoveries, or creating a masterpiece.

> *Gerald, aged 18, had just completed his first year at University. With the assistance of his parents he purchased an air ticket to London and began hitchhiking around England. Later he was joined by his mother, an outstanding doctor, who travelled to many parts of the world to assist the less fortunate with her skills. Gerald egocentrically overcome with the glories of his hitchhiking achievement accused his mother of being a "stick in the mud". "I couldn't imagine you hitchhiking", he said. "You don't know what it's like!" Mother had actually been an adventurous girl for her times and done a lot of hitchhiking, as a university student and since in her job in the underdeveloped countries. Gerald had been told but he could not imagine that the older generation had experiences as he did.*

Thus, adolescents may swing to extremes and regard themselves as especially unique and construct what Elkind calls the *personal fable.*

P. John, another adolescent in *"Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack"*, is somewhat typical of today's conservative pose among adolescents. He is 16, looks middle aged and admits to having a "few solid opinions". Rather dramatically, he describes himself via cliches such as believing in "Law and Order", or "Better Dead than Red", and proffers the information that the "great crusader against communism", Senator Joseph R McCarthy, is one of his heroes. As Matter suggests (1982), after observing P. John, the reader is unprepared for his father on whose kitchen walls hangs a poster of Mao Tse-tung next to another proclaiming "BEAT THE ESTABLISHMENT". Possibly P. John's ultra-conservative posture was an acting-out of his personal fable, an identity totally apart from that of his

very liberal father. The adolescent in love may also demonstrate personal fable behaviours. He/she may construct a romance, perhaps in terms of literary, silver screen, soap opera or popular conventions.

Elkind also suggests that adolescents manifest what he calls *pseudo stupidity* or a tendency to respond to situations at a more complex level than warranted because their newly-formed cognitive abilities are not yet fully under control; there is also apparent *hypocrisy* or a discrepancy between the adolescent's words and deeds caused by a failure to distinguish between the expression of an ideal and its pragmatic realisation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCY AND SELF-ESTEEM IN ADOLESCENCE

Social competency is often defined as including *(a)* social sensitivity or individual knowledge about the appropriate emotional states for specific social contexts and the interactions of the emotions and motives of others; *(b)* the ability to sympathetically understand the feelings of others (empathy); and *(c)* the ability for self initiation (Adams, 1983). It is apparent that this development must be enhanced by the adolescent's emerging intellectual skills, but it also depends on the social context.

Social competency shows some sex differences. Peer popularity in adolescent females is associated with empathy and in males with self initiation. Several studies suggest that despite the loosening of sex role definitions and the rise to fame of androgynous pop stars, certain traditional sex role attributes may differentiate between boys and girls who are likely to be judged by their peers as being popular (Adams, 1983).

In a study in Melbourne by Rosenthal, Moore and Taylor (1983), there were sex differences in adolescent self concept and hence, social competency. Females demonstrated higher levels of adjustment in social relations and intimacy, feelings for others, or interpersonal development, whereas males were stronger on personal development in areas such as autonomy and initiative. Block (1973) argues that the learning of sex roles inevitably leads to these differences in self-concept development.

Many studies have demonstrated that poor peer relations are predictive of long-range and extensive mental health problems (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; Nicholson & Antill, 1981). This suggests that helping adolescents with social competency skills may act as a preventive measure. Training in social sensitivity, empathy and self-initiation could, perhaps, be an essential and relevant part of the school syllabus, and parents could be profitably involved.

CHANGES IN SELF-ESTEEM DURING ADOLESCENCE

The motivation for maintaining and improving self-esteem is ever-present. Consequently, it can be influenced by recent experiences of evaluation by significant others, in specific respects. Two studies have demonstrated that changes in school environment may cause changes in self-esteem for students. For example, it tends to drop on first entering high school (Simmons, Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1973). Multiple changes in school, the beginning of puberty or dating seems to have similar effects (Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave & Bush, 1979). There is some suggestion that self-esteem tends to become slightly more positive during late adolescence and early adulthood (Wylie, 1979).

McCarthy and Hoge (1982) are firmly convinced that this is the case and believe it is due to several factors. They believe that motivation to improve self-esteem becomes stronger with age during adolescence either because of per-

sonal development or because of changed social contexts that trigger it. For example, the development of abstract thinking improves role-taking ability which may aid behaving socially in ways that enhance evaluations of self by others. Gains in personal autonomy and freedom of action during adolescent years may allow the person to manage his or her personal interactions in ways which are more effective in bolstering this self-esteem. It is also possible that as self-esteem becomes more stable and resistant to change over the adolescent years, so the impact of peers is reduced and self-esteem is uninfluenced by their short-term evaluations. It is interesting that Simmons, Rosenberg and Rosenberg (1973) found that students shifting from elementary school to junior high school experienced a reduction in their self-esteem, whereas older students shifting from junior to senior high school did not.

My earlier definition of self-esteem suggested that its dimensions consist of self-acceptance, self-security, social confidence, and self-assertion. Studies of adolescents suggest that feelings of self-security and social confidence are very much related to a sense of affiliation with their schools and teachers, and an ability to relate to peers. Also important are their perceived relationships with teachers and their relationships with individual family members (Ellis, Gehman & Katzenmeyer, 1980).

A sense of close affiliation with the family and with peer values is very important early in adolescence and while there are gradual changes in this, it is not until the adolescent reaches about 16 years that the greatest change begins. At this age, or thereabouts, the self acceptance dimension appears to be in a state of greater flux (Ellis, Gehman & Katzenmeyer, 1980). At 16, of course, in our society adolescents tend to be given more responsibility; they may leave school, learn to drive, and are distinguished more readily from children than are 14 or 15 year olds (Ellis & Davis, 1982). Sixteen-year-olds may begin to openly *discuss conflicts* in their perceptions of themselves and their environment, something which the younger adolescent does not often do.

From 17-18 years the self-acceptance dimension seems to change and reorganise so that the adolescent becomes more secure, socially confident and assertive (Ellis, Gehman & Katzenmeyer, 1980). These authors believe that the dimension has been altered from one which was an external measure of self-acceptance (according to peer and family values), to an internal measure (according to the adolescent's values). The adolescent begins to resist family and peer pressure and emotional blackmail. This appears to represent a change in the structure of self-concept toward an independent, internally-evaluated, self-acceptance (Ellis, Gehman & Katzenmeyer, 1980). At this stage many adolescents will feel they are ready to move from home.

Self-Acceptance and Unemployment

As discussed earlier the adolescent develops his/her self-concept in a social context. The adolescent has to make sense of the world and this, in turn, results in a self-definition in that context.

Schooling and formal education operates on the expectation that one will ultimately get a job or marry someone with a job. During the hedonism of the sixties and seventies, this was pragmatically possible when jobs came freely. Doing "one's own thing" is now difficult for many affected by the recession. The expectation of the self as an employed person is dashed for many, and leads to a feeling of lack of control and to poor self-esteem. School and society needs to face up to the reality of the 80's. Alternatives to employment, education for leisure, continuing education, and other measures are needed.

It is important to ask whether the experiences in the schools and the family are such that other alternatives are given to the adolescent. Many young people

are unable to find employment in their chosen vocation and many of these indicate great resourcefulness. They research missing services. One couple began delivering healthy, low calory lunches to offices. Another set up a transport service for the elderly while another began a "ring a grandma" service for young single mothers. Some who have been forced to go on the dole use the time to develop a skill. Several girls whom I know have become carpenters and are very much in demand because they are often considered to be more careful and more suitable for work. Others take up art or music - things they have wanted to explore.

I think what has always been behind such endeavours is a school and family that has encouraged good self-esteem and the notion that education is an ongoing thing. It does not stop at the end of school or university. Where there is a strong sense that one can go on learning, exploring and expanding oneself there is a good self-esteem.

ADOLESCENT'S THINKING ABOUT ADOLESCENT PROBLEMS

Adolescent Pregnancy and Drug Abuse

The earlier descriptions of adolescent thought help one understand some puzzling aspects of adolescents and also give insight into some things which our society views as problematical, such as teenage pregnancy and use of drugs.

There tends to be an assumption that, given access to sex education, adolescents will become responsible and self-regulating. Yet it appears that many adolescents fail to apply the facts of contraception to which almost all of them have been exposed (Stassen Berger, 1980) and many do not seem to take the possibility of pregnancy seriously. Why? The explanation often appears to lie in the fact that many adolescents, due to the previously described cognitive immaturity and egocentric thought processes, have difficulty with logical hypothetical arguments such as "What if you became pregnant?" and many believe the personal fable that they cannot be touched by ills that beset others (Stassen Berger, 1980).

Another sign of cognitive immaturity noted by Furstenberg (1976), is that because many young people like to think of sex as emotional and spontaneous, they feel it is not something that should be prepared for. Furstenberg also found the idea that "good girls don't" was still alive to the extent that "good girls" were not supposed to be sexually activite unless the passion of the moment carried them away. Forethought, such as carrying a diaphragm, or even worse, taking a pill daily, meant that a girl had sex on her mind even when she was not involved in love-making and, therefore, was "bad".

Stassen Berger (1980) also points out that parental cognitive immaturity does not help the situation and that parents often limit themselves to vague general rules such as "don't do anything foolish" and are, nevertheless, shocked when their daughters become pregnant. Many studies have found that while adolescents would prefer to obtain information about sex from their parents, most of them actually get it from peers (Dickinson, 1978).

Similarly, adolescent egocentricity of thought and the stirring for an independant self probably often figures in drug usage. At some periods (Phillips, 1983), adolescents are actively striving to be different from their parents and to reject standards set by authority rather than striving to develop positive values, and in this pursuit of difference some take up drugs. Because of this cognitive immaturity Stasson Berger (1980) argues that adolescents are not mature enough to experiment with drugs, much less to become daily users. The ado-

lescent's behaviour with regard to drugs is significantly influenced by the attitudes and practices of parents and is strongly correlated with parents' use of drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, and prescription drugs (Stassen Berger, 1980).

Persistent School Absenteeism

Research studies on children who have been absent from school have tended to concentrate on school phobia or school refusal (Phillips, 1980). There has been a minimum of research on the relationship between school absenteeism and the self-concept.

Reid (1982) found that absentees had poorer overall self-esteem than non absentees and that their self-esteem was very poor in relation to school, and in particular, school learning. These children also experienced situations outside school which can induce poor self-esteem, such as inadequate and multiple fostering, absence of caring and supportive parent figures, inadequate housing, stultifying poverty, and general personal deprivation. These things do not necessarily breed poor self-esteem but these children experienced failure in social and family situations. In school they experienced persistent failures, such that one might hypothesise that many, in order to retain some self-respect and relief, withdraw from a belittling experience. The pupil begins to disaffiliate only when he/she feels rejected by the school or cut off from it because he/she is unable to meet its demands (Hamblin, 1977).

For the modern teacher, an understanding picture of children's self-concept is as vital a part of professional knowledge as is the subject matter to be taught. Reid (1982) also suggests that if we wish to change school absentees' attitudes toward their schools and their education we will need to improve their self-esteem in those areas by means of such measures as more individual attention and assistance with reading and writing and clothing. As well, teachers should find it useful to develop their own repertoire of aids from Self-Esteem Programmes which have been mentioned in previous Unit for Child Studies papers (Maron, 1980; Fahey, 1980; Phillips, 1983). Further, parents should be encouraged to be involved by running frequent talks on self-esteem as part of the school/parent night programmes.

Teachers have not been sufficiently trained in child development to detect children at risk or to help them. There are too few inservice courses for teachers on the subject. Further, the pastoral care, counselling, organisational and social facilities in our schools are often inadequate.

SUBCULTURES AND ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

Identity is similar to self-concept but tends to be focussed on determining oneself in terms of the broader social ethos. Erik Erikson (1968) has suggested that the adolescent is not so much asking "Who am I?" but "Who am I in the world today?" (Phillips, 1983 In asking that question an adolescent may be in a state of *diffusion*, not yet sure whether he/she is adult or child, will be an airline pilot or a bank clerk, or will end up a liberal or labour or other voter. In our society adolescents are given a *moritorium*, a time to sort these things out before they commit themselves. Some, however, at an early age, take over their parents' values without any questioning. Erikson describes this as a premature identity and sees searching and questioning in adolescence as most helpful for long-term identity and self-concept development.

Others drop out of society and make their own history, and find an identity ith a group outside the social norms. This Erikson describes as a negative

identity, and the young at Nimbin in the late sixties may have been characterised by him in this way. "Negative" is perhaps an unfortunate choice of word for the young at Nimbin had many positive ideals. Negative in this context implies acting in a way that is contrary to social conventions.

Certainly, if one takes on a negative identity and behaves in a way that is contrary to social norms, one is noticed and that is one of the objects of the exercise! It is very easy to be a nobody and unnoticed. Adolescent sub-cultures tend to devise ways to be noticed and thereby assert their differences from mainstream culture.

Some sub-cultures take on an "outlaw" role such as is found in some motor cycle gangs which provide a family for their members and exist outside mainstream culture and seem uninterested in remaining part of it (Levine & Stumpf, 1983). Many members of these groups are of working class origin.

British researchers tend to explain youth subcultures in terms of social class and as a means by which downtrodden groups can handle their social plight and obtain a distinct identity at the same time (Clarke, 1976; Clarke, Hall Jefferson & Roberts, 1976). For example, the teddy boys of the late 50s and early 60s took over the Saville Row Edwardian collared suits (originally marketed for young aristocrats) and in a symbolic way resignified something they had appropriated from the dominant culture and became a distrinct group.

In the sixties, many of these sub-cultures asserted their difference by providing their own lifestyles as an option for living within the mainstream. These were *alternative* sub-cultures such as the hippies who rejected the materialism of their parents and withdrew to communes. The aforementioned settlers in Nimbin can be included in this alternative group. The depressed economic climate and horror of totalitarianism and a violent society have spawned adolescent sub-cultures without the broad ideologies of the sixties. The assertion of difference has taken the form of *reflecting* some of the worst features of late twentieth century society with the intention of shocking. Punk culture is a case in point.

The Punks

The debut year of punk rock is generally regarded as 1976. The first bands and scenemakers were from London and New York (Levine & Stump, 1983). The appearance of these early punks was marked by short and spiky, brightly coloured hair, torn T-shirts and the use of razor blades and safety pins as jewellery. Some were symbols associated with fascism such as swastikas and iron crosses. These, and themes of bondage and sexual fetishism, were effective devices selected by the punks to repulse and shock a mainstream society and indeed, punks were seen as unsavoury, hostile and dedicatedly self-conscious.

Thorough and understanding studies of the punks are rare and Levine and Stump (1983) represent one of the few. They have examined the subculture of the punk rock scene in Los Angeles. Following an initial period of imitating London punks, the Los Angeles punk rock community emerged. Hair coloured pink and other bright colours was rejected in favour of jet black and platinum blonde. Loud, tattered clothes gave way to black and red thrift shop fare. Dirty tennis shoes were replaced by heavy black leather biker boots wrapped in padlocked steel chains. The resulting appearance was menacing. The prevailing themes of this punk sub-culture scene seem to revolve around the interrelated imagery of death, violence, perversion, loathsomeness, chaos and victimisation.

Levine and Stumpf found punks very conscious of the images they create. They like being viewed as society's misfits or outcasts, and glorify this image by

naming their bands with titles such as Germs, Castration, Squid, Slashers. Informants who are punks stated that punks want to repel those in the mainstream culture and to challenge them with what the latter would regard as negative symbols - repulsive band names, iron crosses, swastikas, biker's clothes and the like. The heart of the punk movement seems to be the embodiment of that which is the object of fear, disgust, or rejection for the rest of society, or of that which represents anarchy and death. With this intensive effort of stylistic expression the Los Angeles punk movement has become influential elsewhere. Some of its imagery is now found in the mainstream culture.

In the punk sub-culture self-preservation is achieved by generating an aura of intimidation designed to insulate the subculture from the dominant culture. It also serves as a rallying point. The punks seek to emphasises that fear is ubiquitous in the broader culture. By embodying the theme of fear in their dress, their music and other symbols of the sub-culture, the punks reflect their perception of fear in the wider culture. In short, the functional role of the punk sub-culture is to exist outside the main culture, while illuminating central features of it. Levine and Stumpf argue that these reflective type sub-cultures need more serious study and that we can learn much about mainstream society from them. This is not to say that all punk adolescents in the Australian scene are as thoughtful about their styles as the heart of the punk movement, but usually there is some understanding of the genuiness of the punk subculture.

The situation in Britain and Australia is probably less stylised and deliberate than it is in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, ersatz recession dress, hair highlighted or coloured in non-regular hair colours such as pink, and gelled in spikes or mohawk styles, and the garish make-up is well outside the custom and is, therefore, an eye-catcher and a head-turner. The punk is noticed. He/she has found an audience. Punks are also making a statement about adult conventions of dress. Punk dress is a demonstration to adults that they should not take people at face value; they should recognise that beneath the unconventional dress there is an acceptable person. Adolescent punks vociferously resent the commercialisation of punk dress and the copying of the gel styles by adults, and, as the copying increases, the more outlandish punk dress must become to assert the difference.

Despite its attraction for middle-class adolescents, punk dress is, of course, classless. This is important when one is fighting for recognition in a hierarchical society such as the British one is, and it is strongly seen as thus by punk youth. This is probably one of the reasons punk culture is more widespread in London than it is in Sydney.

Add to this the greater poverty in London and Britain, and the even greater difficulties there are of fulfilling one's hopes in a very depressed economic climate, and some other factors in British punk culture become clear. Adolescence is the permissable time for a glorious splash as a person in a society which permits a moritorium for adolescence and offers rather gloomy prospects thereafter.

There are many varieties of adolescent subcultures: the skin heads, the new romantics, the blitz kids, all have distinctive styles of dress which draw attention. These sub-cultures provide a sense of group identity and tend to have their own music, much of which is about the search for self and identity. Schools and families could use discussions of the words of popular songs as a pivot for the discussion of conflicts that exist in the adolescent's life. These excursions into self-understanding are a way to stimulate the development of self-awareness and awareness of others in adolescents.

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